

KANSAS



Department of Health and Environment

Health Education Facts

Prevent Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

What is baby bottle tooth decay?

Baby bottle tooth decay occurs when a child's teeth are exposed to sugary liquids for long periods of time. Almost any liquid your child drinks, except water, contains sugar. This includes milk, formula, fruit juices, and other sweetened liquids such as soft drinks.

Baby bottle tooth decay causes unnecessary suffering to young children. The decay can develop rapidly, involve many teeth, and cause severe pain. A child's upper front teeth are most likely to be damaged, but others may be decayed as well. The cost to treat this condition can be more than \$2,000.

How common is baby bottle tooth decay?

Baby bottle tooth decay is a leading dental problem among children under three years of age. If you must put your baby to bed with a bottle, fill it only with water. Sucking on a bottle filled with other liquids for long periods of time can harm your baby's teeth.

When a child is awake, saliva helps wash away sugars and acids in the mouth that cause tooth decay. During sleep, however, saliva flow is reduced.

The baby who is put to bed with a bottle may not swallow the liquid quickly. Instead, liquid drops slowly into the child's mouth, sometimes for hours, and collects around the upper teeth, where it can dissolve the tooth enamel and cause decay.

Decay occurs quickly and causes severe pain. The longer this practice is continued, the more damage is done. Sucking on a bottle containing a sugary liquid for long periods during the day also can cause tooth decay.

Preventing baby bottle tooth decay

- Fluoride is the most effective agent for preventing tooth decay. If your drinking water is fluoridated, encourage your child to drink it. If it

is not fluoridated, ask your family dentist or doctor about daily fluoride drops or tablets.

- If you use a pacifier to comfort your child, use a clean pacifier recommended by your baby's doctor. Never dip the pacifier in any sweet substance.
- After each feeding, gently clean your baby's teeth and gums with a damp washcloth or gauze pad. When most of the 20 baby teeth have appeared, about age two, start gently brushing your child's teeth with a toothbrush and a small amount of toothpaste at least once a day. It is best to brush the teeth just before bedtime.
- Have your baby's teeth examined by a dentist by age two to three - as soon as all your child's 20 baby teeth have appeared. Anytime, however, you notice that your child has dental problems, take the child to the dentist immediately.

Use proper bottle feeding for your child

Teeth are susceptible to decay as soon as they appear in the mouth. To protect your child's teeth from the start, you and others who take care of your baby must know about proper bottle-feeding practices. To prevent baby bottle tooth decay, follow these preventive measures:

- If your baby needs a bottle at bedtime for comfort, use only plain water.
- Close to your child's first birthday, begin to wean your child from the bottle. Teach your child to drink directly from a cup instead.

